

My name is Warren Illi, I live in the Flathead Valley of Northwest Montana.

I have a hand out with my remarks

I am here to represent myself, my family and

**Flathead Wildlife, Inc.** - Northwest Montana's largest and oldest sportsmen club with over 200 members. I am a past president, current Board member and Treasurer of this club.

**Thompson Chain of Lakes Homeowners Association** - I am the current president. We are a group of 150 families that live year-round or seasonally around this chain of lakes located between Libby and Kalispell.

We want to go on record as strongly supporting SB-395. We commend Senator Blasdel for sponsoring this legislation.

**Hunting is Montana's oldest tradition.** It has been going on since man first came to Montana after the most recent ice age.

**With a wealth of over 30 million acres of public land,** we have some of the best hunting in the United States.

Until recently, **Montana had a higher percentage of resident hunters** and fishermen than any other state.

But as Senator Blasdel's legislation indicates, **hunter numbers have dropped drastically** during the last few years. One of the reasons is the lack of young people taking up the sport of hunting.

During the last 30 years, a decline in the number of hunters has occurred throughout American. In response to this decline of hunters, **over 34 states have met the challenge** by passing legislation reducing the minimum age to hunt. Those states have generally shown an increase in new young hunters. These new youth programs are known as Family Afield hunting programs sponsored by the NRA, Wild Turkey Foundation and other national hunting groups.

**Montana has chosen to reject increased youth hunting programs** during the last several legislative sessions.

The **result is reduced recruitment** of new hunters in Montana. It is time to change.

**Family Afield youth hunting programs in other states have added over one million new young hunters** in recent years.

The **surrounding states** of North and South Dakota, Wyoming and Idaho **all have youth hunting programs**

Youth hunting programs in other states have shown a remarkable **safety record**, with hunting accidents among apprentice hunters at only 20% of what other hunters experience.

So anyone that tells you that young hunters and their mentors are not safety minded is simply blowing smoke.

**Sometimes Hunter Safety Instructors will tell you that they can best judge when a young person is ready to hunt.** That is pure bureaucratic nonsense. Pure garbage. I have an 11 year old granddaughter, Katie, that wants to hunt this fall. She has been going on hunting trips since she was 7 or 8. As her grandfather, with my 65 years of accident free hunting experience and my son, her dad, with 35 years of accident free hunting experience, **I believe her dad and I can best judge if she is ready to hunt, not some bureaucrat who had never met Katie.** I can guarantee you that no one in this world will be more concerned for hunter safety than her dad and myself.

Current Montana law allows 10 and 11 year old youth, when accompanied by a parent or responsible adult **can legally go afield and shoot gophers** and other critters like coyotes. **So why can't they hunt some game animals?**

In summary, I believe that **Senator Blasdel's bill is an important first step** in getting Montana youth away from their smart phones and x box games **and back into the outdoors and hunting.**

**I ask you to give this old grandpa the joy of taking my granddaughter, Katie, hunting this fall.**

Thank you for listening.